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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ILLEGAL TIMBER SEIZURES IN INDONESIA

¶1. Summary: Recent seizures of suspected illegal timber in East Java and Papua highlight the continued challenge of illegal logging in Indonesia. The USG continues to support the Government of Indonesia's efforts to tackle the problem through capacity building.

This support includes an upcoming illegal logging/timber training workshop which the U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency will conduct in mid-July for Customs officials in East Java, using funds set aside under the bilateral U.S.-Indonesia MOU on illegal logging.

End Summary.

Surabaya: Customs Seizes Suspect Timber

¶2. On May 15, Customs officials in Surabaya reported to the provincial parliament that they had seized 190 cubic meters of merbau wood being transported in nine containers. Officials said the timber, valued at up to USD 190,000, was being exported to China. The Tanjung Perak Port Custom Office's Head of Investigation and Services, Choirul Saleh, said that his office seized the containers because they found discrepancies between the wood and accompanying documents. The exporter, PT. Surabaya Trading and Co., claimed that the wood would be used as building parts for a bridge, and that state-owned company PT. Sucofindo had surveyed and certified the timber.

¶3. On May 26, East Java parliament summoned Sucofindo, Tanjung Perak-Surabaya Customs, the East Java Office of Trade and PT Surabaya Trading and Co. to provide more information about the case.

At the meeting, Saleh stated that his office had asked the East Java Office of Trade whether the shipment's documentation satisfied regulatory requirements. Saleh said he is awaiting a response before taking further action.

Papua: Hoard of Timber Found

¶4. On June 1, the Asmat Indigenous Community Association (LMAA) of Asmat Regency, Papua Province, discovered an abandoned stockpile of approximately 20,000 merbau logs. The logs, with diameters ranging from 70-100 centimeters, were located on communal lands approximately 9 hours from the nearest town. LMAA suspects that the logs were felled illegally. Besides the logs, LMAA also found heavy equipment, including a bulldozer, backhoe, ten trucks, 8 storage tanks containing 20,000 liters of fuel, and electric generators. The group did not find any workers at the location, and LMAA Vice Chairman Anandus Anakat opined the workers ran away because the suspected company (PT. Rimba Megah Lestari-RML) mistreated them.

¶5. The Regent of Asmat, Yuvensius Biakai, claims he never issued a forest concession permit (HPH) in his district. However, District Police Chief Adjunct Commissioner Mursalim admits he provided police

protection in 2008, upon instruction from his superiors, to a transport vessel bringing heavy equipment to the location. Asmat Regency's Forest Office Head Ellias Bapaimu confirmed that PT. RML had been operating in Asmat but did not know who issued its concession permit. He revealed PT. RML had been unable to remove the logs because the Governor of Papua issued a decree in 2007 banning log exports from Papua Province.

Merbau: Attractive and Endangered

¶6. Merbau (species *Intsia bijuga* and *Intsia palembanica*) is a slow-growing timber species that takes 75-80 years to reach commercial size. It is highly sought after and is threatened by destructive and illegal logging. Indonesia is in consultations with other countries in Southeast Asia to consider listing merbau under Appendix III of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species' (CITES). This means Indonesia would require export permits for merbau from Indonesia, while other States would at least have to provide certificates of origin for their merbau exports. The tree is highly sought after and is mainly sourced from Southeast Asia, in particular Papua and Papua New Guinea.

CBP to Train Customs Officials

¶7. The U.S. Customs Border Protection (CBP) will conduct a training workshop on July 13-17, 2009 for Indonesian Customs officials in Surabaya, East Java. The workshop is one of the final activities funded from the original USD 1 million set aside for cooperative activities under the U.S.-Indonesia MOU on Combating Illegal Logging and Associated Trade (2006).

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